



ANDREW RYDER 2017-11-25

FÉLIX GUATTARI: ORIGINS IN TROTSKYISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

NONPOLITICS DELEUZE/GUATTARI, FEATURED, GUATTARI, LA BORDE, MARXISM, PSYCHOANALYSIS, TROTZKIYSM, WILHELM REICH

Félix Guattari is well-known for his philosophical works, co-authored with Gilles Deleuze. However, his early work has only become available in the Anglophone world recently. Guattari's earlier inheritance from Trotskyism and from Lacanian psychoanalysis presents an important backdrop to his mature work. The intertwining of these two perspectives, along with Sartrian existentialism, prepared him for the encounter with Deleuze and the innovative approach to questions of difference, identity, and potentiality that they produced together. Further, attention to the early Guattari provides unique perspective to reflect on the history of exchange between Marx and Freud, in the writings of Leon Trotsky and Wilhelm Reich.

Guattari encountered revolutionary politics as a young man, first by joining the Young Revolutionaries Movement, the youth wing of the Internationalist Communist Party (PCI). This organization, founded in 1944, was the major Trotskyist formation in France, and the section represented in the Fourth International. The PCI's strategy of the time was characterized by entrism; they wished to infiltrate the mainstream, Stalinist Communist movement, particularly the French Communist Party (PCF). The organization also organized brigades to support Josip Broz Tito's independent Stalinist state in Yugoslavia, which was vituperatively denounced by the Soviet Union. PCF members attacked Guattari and his friends when they became aware of his activities in Yugoslavia and on behalf of Tito. These tensions led to the split of the PCI in 1952. Despite the difficulties with entrism, Guattari remained loyal to the official PCI, led by Pierre Frank. Because it had become known that he was a Trotskyist, he could not, however, join the PCF. As a philosophy student at the Sorbonne, he gravitated toward Raymond Petit and a few others who had begun to advocate a pro-Chinese direction. In 1954, he visited China along with a number of other students of this tendency. However, Guattari did not embrace Maoism, which was becoming increasingly fashionable in French radical milieus.

After the publication of Nikita Khrushchev's speech revealing Joseph Stalin's crimes, two years later, Guattari believed that an opportunity had opened for new ideas and activities to the left of the PCF. Guattari worked alongside Denis Berger, another member of the PCI who wished to overcome entrism. Guattari and Berger produced a new radical newsletter titled *Discussion Tribunal*, which received initial financial and moral support from a famous left-wing philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre. The nucleus of Trotskyists around this journal became increasingly radicalized and opposed to the USSR after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in

the fall of 1956. This group also denounced the PCF's vote for French intervention in Algeria and failure to advocate decolonization. The group associated with the journal organized significant protests against the war effort, leading to repression by the police.

In 1958, the journal increased in circulation and influence and became known as *The Communist Path* (*La Voie communiste*). When the PCI failed to support the journal, Guattari and others left the group. This event marked Guattari's break with the orthodox Trotskyism of the Fourth International, and his attempt to move beyond their perspective. As François Dosse writes, the journal "was more than a publication; it was a small organization on the margins of Trotskyism." Particularly organized around war resistance and solidarity with Algeria, the journal also criticized the PCF and Stalinism, and conducted an interview with Sartre. A prominent French Trotskyist, Daniel Bensaid, recalled the effect of the journal many years later:

An aunt of Annette, a Communist orthodox above all suspicion, slipped into my hands one day a copy of *La Voie Communiste*. She claimed this was to show me the slander of the anti-Communist press, camouflaged as criticism from the left. Was she sincere? Was it a ruse to test me? The fact is that this reading did not scandalise me. The tone of the articles, their insolence toward the clerical leadership of the Party and their criticism of its lukewarm stance on the Algerian question, rather aroused my sympathy. I couldn't know that the anonymity or pseudonyms of its writers concealed such names as Félix Guattari, Lucien Sebag, Denis Berger and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit.

Guattari had also begun to work at a clinic for the mentally ill, at La Borde. Increasingly, he began to draw from this clinical experience and from psychoanalysis, as well as revolutionary Marxism. After the end of Algerian War in 1962, the publication lost much of its energy and *raison d'être*. Lacking a clear organizational focus, many of its writers were drawn to Maoism, which Guattari rejected. In his view, the insurrectionary élan of the Maoists carried with it a "grimacing return to Stalinism [...] boy-scoutism, the 'disdain for fatigue, the 'courageous labor' style, 'simple life and hard struggle.'" Such joylessness, for him, was counter-revolutionary. He left the journal in 1964, and it folded shortly after.

In the wake of his experience with *The Communist Path*, Guattari continued to explore three primary inspirations. The first was Sartre's philosophy, which began with an existential phenomenology of an individual's experience of the world. Sartre had famously declared that everyone was entirely free and responsible for concrete choices. However, Sartre had become increasingly interested in Marxism throughout the 1950s, and Guattari followed this development. By the end of the decade, Sartre composed sophisticated analyses of historical situations that tried to locate a margin of free possibility, from which a revolutionary collective could seize a liberating potential and produce a less oppressive society. Sartre's version of Marxism demanded revolutionary organization, but was skeptical of the methods of Stalinized parties.

Second, Guattari continued to explore the ramifications of Leon Trotsky's revolutionary practice and his critique of the degeneration of the Soviet Union. He believed that Trotsky's great works preserved the practical and theoretical core of Marxism, and could be reactivated to produce new socialist revolutions. Last, Guattari became strongly affected by the radicalization of Freudian psychoanalysis advocated by Jacques Lacan. Lacan argued that analysis could help people realize new possibilities of freedom, by liberating them from notions of selfhood propagated by social conformity. These three inspirations certainly had things in common: They offered sophisticated means of breaking with conformism in psychoanalysis, individualism in philosophy, and dogmatism in politics, producing new social possibilities. Guattari later said, in an interview: "As a militant, I was a Marxist inspired by Trotsky; when I worked I was a Freudo-Lacanian; when I reflected I was for the most part Sartrean, but all of that did not flow together very well." There were difficulties in combining philosophy, psychoanalysis, and political activism, however valuable Guattari found the pursuit. This project drew from an early legacy of attempts to synthesize Marxism with psychoanalytic insights, previously explored by Trotsky.

Traditionally, Marxists are often skeptical of Freud, and of psychoanalytic methods and interpretations. However, Trotsky believed that Freud's work was very valuable. Many of the Bolsheviks supported psychoanalysis in the early years of the Russian revolution. However, the leadership of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), which was undergoing the process of Stalinization, tended to prefer the competing theories of Ivan Pavlov. Pavlov emphasized a physiological, somatic approach, locating psychological phenomena in biological processes. During the revolutionary period, Trotsky advocated a synthesis of the ideas of Pavlov and Freud. He had developed a familiarity with Freud's ideas even prior to the revolution, during the period of his residency in Vienna. In his essay of 1926, "Culture and Socialism," Trotsky argues that both Pavlov and Freud can be considered materialists, although Pavlov is more empirical and Freud is more speculative. While he felt that Freud's explanations were less certain, he defended the value of Freud's deductions. As Stalin began to consolidate his power and to denounce Trotsky, Freudian approaches became increasingly associated with Trotskyist dissidence. The psychoanalytic method was condemned in the Soviet Union when Trotsky was exiled. In contrast, Trotsky himself became increasingly favorable toward Freud's views. In 1932, he affirmed Freud's discovery of the unconscious:

Psycho-analysis, with the inspired hand of Sigmund Freud, has lifted the cover of the well which is poetically called the 'soul'. And what has been revealed? Our conscious thought is only a small part of the work of the dark psychic forces. Learned divers descend to the bottom of the ocean and there take photographs of mysterious fishes. Human thought, descending to the bottom of its own psychic sources must shed light on the most mysterious driving forces of the soul and subject them to reason and to will.

It was, then, natural for a revolutionary socialist in the Trotskyist tradition, like Guattari, to gravitate toward psychoanalysis.

Guattari and the Left Opposition

By 1965, Guattari aimed to develop his own tendency of revolutionary Marxism, which would reject Stalinism and Maoism. In his "Nine Theses of the Left Opposition," he argued for a new revolutionary perspective that would draw from Trotsky, but overcome the limitations of the orthodox Trotskyism defended by the PCI. Guattari first insisted that the historical development of politics and economics needed to be understood as globally interconnected; "the advancement of some" requires "the delay of others." Unlike orthodox Trotskyists, who understood the Eastern Bloc as comprised of "degenerated" or "deformed" workers' states, Guattari argued that capitalism consumed the entire globe, stratified by divisions of labor. He believed that the inability to understand the capitalist nature of Stalinist states and parties produced the entrism strategy, as well as illusions about Yugoslavia; Guattari had discovered that these were dead ends. While the French Maoists also believed that the Eastern Bloc was state capitalist, they argued that the Chinese critique would be capable of achieving socialism through a Cultural Revolution; Guattari rejected the authenticity of the Maoist outlook and believed that the Chinese state was also capitalist. Guattari argued that international crises had produced a "state-monopoly capitalism" in which states nationalized or controlled many industries. While the post-World War II period allowed for privatization and renewed competition in the non-Communist world, a general integration between the state's coercive power and the process of capital accumulation remained as an international phenomenon.

Guattari argued that capital was increasingly international. However, the bourgeoisie required the maintenance of independent nation-states in order to consolidate its power and prevent a united working class. As a result, he concluded that the proletariat needed to create new institutions, capable of producing a new revolutionary subjectivity that could exceed the domination of these states. Guattari believed that the national Communist parties were entirely incapable of doing this, because they adhered to reformism, patriotism and imperialism; as a result, only a new body of workers' power, drawing on a recognition of the international character of working-class experience, could hope to pioneer a new social revolution. He held this basic outlook for his entire life.

Reich and Freudo-Marxism

As discussed previously, the Bolsheviks – especially Trotsky – took a keen interest in Freud's work. Within the Soviet Union, Stalin suppressed this research; but other figures in Western Europe and the United States continued to pursue the possible points of agreement between Marxism and psychoanalysis. Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian psychoanalyst, was among the first to call for a "sexual revolution" in the book of this title, published in 1936. Reich understood sexual repression as a form of alienation, as discussed by Marx. He aimed to provide a historical-materialist context for Freud's understanding of social repression. Repression was not really the necessary result of civilization's advancement, and a consequence of it, as Freud believed; rather, capitalism had produced a distorted relationship to sexuality. This was largely bound up in the enforcement of the bourgeois family, which demanded a precise configuration of sexual desire (what we now call heterosexism). Reich wrote that socialist revolution would eliminate these conditions by transforming the gendered division of labor that undergirds capitalist social reproduction:

The worker's society is then faced with the important task of thinking about the future order of sexual life and preparing for it. This future order cannot and will not be other than, as Lenin put it, a full love-life yielding strength and joy. [...] human beings will once again become capable of enjoying their sexuality, because private economy, which is the basis of sexual oppression and which makes people incapable of enjoyment and therefore sick or crazy in the true sense of the word, will drop away.

Reich also believed that socialist revolution was not the only possibility. Fascism could also harness collective sexual desires in a sadistic fashion. In his book of 1933, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Reich argued that the bourgeois family could function as a "reactionary germ cell" that provided the starting point for an authoritarian society. In their work of 1972, *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari adopted aspects of Reich's thesis, arguing that desire was a fundamental social factor, channeled and arranged in various ways. They agreed with Reich that the capitalist state had produced a particular family relationship, described by Freud's "Oedipus complex," which could provide the psychological foundation for reactionary, even fascist, political events. They also believed that desire had the potential to exceed these bounds, and that this could lead to a new and more positive social outcome. In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari assign a political value to struggles over sexuality and gender; the fight against the oppression of sexual minorities will lead to a struggle with capitalism itself.

However, Deleuze and Guattari believed that Reich's approach was limited by some of its preconceptions. In their reading, his analysis depended on a sharp distinction between more natural, rational desires, in contrast to more negative, false ones. As a result, he lacked a truly general and materialist theory of desire. One could link this to Trotsky's comments about Freud's discovery of the "mysterious fishes" of the unconscious; Deleuze and Guattari argued that Reich was treating good and bad desires as if they were entirely different species of fish, rather than recognizing their common origins.

In this respect, Deleuze and Guattari partly followed the innovative re-reading of Marx by Althusser, which Guattari had previously held at a distance. Althusser had criticized the Marxist humanist tradition, which included Reich, because it depended on recourse to an authentic prior norm – "man" – which had been alienated by capitalist society. He believed that this humanism was

susceptible to Stalinist appropriation, because it placed a pre-assigned, isolated understanding of human potential above the class struggle. In contrast, Althusser argued that the conception of “man” or “the human” as a fundamental origin was actually a secondary effect of the social class relations. Deleuze and Guattari credited him for his understanding of the fragmented, multiple nature of institutions, which could serve the dominant end of capital accumulation without a single or unitary logic. Rather than viewing “the human” as a yardstick of what was good and bad in the capitalist manipulation of desire, Deleuze and Guattari believed in building new social subjects that would exceed domination by the state or capitalist institutions. They believed that this potential was inherent in the excessive dimension of desires. This element of excess identified not indulgence or decadence, but the inability to accept exploitation and the social development of new forms of creativity.

Thanks to Fainan Lakha for her assistance with this essay.

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